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AIR UNIVERSITY

THE HOMEFRONT:  
WORLD WAR ONE AT HOME

by

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## *Preface*

What I have learned about America in World War I has been far more than I ever imagined. The topic of the changes in America during this time is of special interest to me. Changes in society, were they due to the war? What other factors could have caused the changes we experienced as a nation?

The war saw many new technologies introduced for the first time, but the isolationism of America was slipping away. It was a new dawn for the immigrants and citizens of the United States. The War only sped up events that still affect us, this was a time of change. I hope readers will come away with a new appreciation of the origins of many things we take for granted today. Even if it is a bit of history. Special thanks to LTC Taylor and Maj Stafford for their counsel and constant insistence to write often throughout this research project, and sharing their knowledge of the events surrounding the world almost one hundred years ago. I am also grateful to those ACSC students who not only read this paper, but also provided honest feedback.

## *Abstract*

America was drawn into a conflict, one in which it really had no intention of participating. Regardless, America found itself a belligerent. This paper is a brief study of the general causes of the war, Wilson's reaction, how America prepared and supported her troops. This examination will include a political, economic and social overview of America and how those changes are still affecting us today.

Almost every social, political or economic conflict of this century can be traced back to the incredible bloodletting on the battlefields of the Great War. The Great War framed the political posturing of several generations of diplomats, politicians, military officers and everyday people. The gross failures of the war-making powers generated and fed a century of rebellion against any legitimate authority and the monarchial systems of government in particular.

Prohibition and the influenza pandemic also took their place in forming America at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## Defining Moments in History

*Faithfulness to the truth of history involves far more than a research, however patient and scrupulous, into special facts. Such facts may be detailed with the most minute exactness, and yet the narrative, taken as a whole, may be unmeaning or untrue. The narrator must seek to imbue himself with the life and spirit of the time. He must study events in their bearings near and remote; in the character, habits, and manners of those who took part in them. He must himself be, as it were, a sharer or a spectator of the action he describes.*

— Francis Parkman

Determining the beginning or ending of many things is very easy; the beginning and ending of a century are not necessarily defined by the calendar date. World events often determine the beginning of a new century. Thus, the beginning of the twentieth century did not necessarily begin with 1900. People consider the Great War, World War I, as the true beginning of the last century. The world was in a tremendous state of flux, following the industrial revolution the world was changing rapidly.

What a time to be alive! What an exciting time, the world was enjoying the benefits of the industrial revolution; the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had brought riches to the people of the world. In the United States, urbanization and modernization were creating a new America. Immigration was bringing hundreds of thousands into the country eager to start a new life. Many immigrants from old countries in Europe, including Germany.

The US was changing from an agrarian to industrial country and more people working off the farm, people began to make more money, and could afford a more material lifestyle. More people began to see Ford's Model T edging the horse off the roadways and seeing an occasional airplane. The newspapers carry news of local interest and world events, but world events take

second page. The conflict in Europe is seen as a European problem, Americans in general are more interested in what is happening here at home. The United States is slowly being electrified, from 1900 to 1914 many railroad terminals are being rebuilt, taking advantage of increased industrial output and more Americans traveling increases rail transportation across the country. The airplane is making people stop in their tracks just to watch it float in the sky. It would be safe to say that the average American's attitude was shaped by the changes in his material world. Little did he care for what was happening half way around the world.

An example of the general attitude of Americans toward World War I was printed in the newspaper, *Plain Dealer*, of Wabash, Indiana "We never appreciated so keenly as now the foresight exercised by our forefathers in emigrating from Europe."<sup>1</sup> According to Moore, the average American was reading the text of our diplomatic protests and replies in the newspapers, but soon found the replies much like the communiqués, adroit, polite, circuitous, and too long. As time went by he quit reading beyond the headlines and was content to leave the situation to the President.<sup>2</sup> Another problem average Americans had was difficulty in pronouncing places of battles and the names of generals. It appeared that American's in general did not care and were happy to not be a part of the war in the early years of the conflict.

President Wilson wanted America to remain neutral. Yet, in his speech on 19 August 1914 he knew American citizens needed to come together -

"... The spirit of the nation in this critical matter will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits, and men proclaim as their opinions upon the street.

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and

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<sup>1</sup> Sullivan, Mark, *Our Times*, New York, 1996, Schribner, p. 444

<sup>2</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, 1937, Greenberg Publisher, p. 37



circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Message to Congress*, 63rd Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. No. 566 (Washington, 1914), pp. 3-4.  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1914/wilsonneut.html>

## **Causes of the War to End all Wars**

The primary cause of the European War was the mismatching of political, geographic and ethnic boundaries separating the ancient tribes of Europe into more modern nation states. Political, ethnic, military and geographic points of tension included 1. Alsace-Lorraine: These were two French provinces lost to Germany as a result of the Franco-Prussian War. 2. Schleswig-Holstein: These were two Danish provinces lost to Germany as part of the Austro-Prussian War. 3. Poland: This once powerful nation was repeatedly divided between the three royal houses of Austria, Prussia and Russia. 4. Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Austrian government as a result of a short series of Balkan Wars, between the Ottoman Turks and their former client states absorbed These two Balkan provinces. 5. Austria-Hungary: This dual monarchy under the House of Hapsburg contained three alphabets, three religions and eleven or more language groups. The strains of ethnic nationalism challenged the ruling ability of the diets and autocrats of the Empire. 6. Russia: The House of Romanov ruled over seventy-some subject peoples inhabiting the vast stretches of East European and Asian geography.

Americans in general had no appreciation of these events or the coming bloodshed in Europe. These events were, however getting the attention of America's politicians and business leaders. Irregardless of the causes, American business trade would increase orders to the new industries to fuel the war machines of the belligerents and extending credit to the old world made good business sense. But the US found itself doing a balancing act of sorts doing business with both sides.

## DIPLOMATIC FAILURES

At first, the assassination of Hapsburg archduke Ferdinand and his wife seemed just one more problem in the Balkans and key leaders, bureaucrats and diplomats hurried away to their annual summer vacations to avoid the stifling July heat of the assorted capital cities. By the time the first team of power brokers reassembled to meet the crisis head on, it was too late.

According to Drew and Snow in *From Lexington to Desert Storm*, the mediocrity of the political leadership in Europe was a major factor contributing to the outbreak of war.<sup>4</sup> During the nineteenth century the Concert of Europe fell apart after the Franco-Prussian War. Key diplomatic relations between Russia and Germany were based on the cousins' relationship between the German Kaiser and the Russian Tsar.

Woodrow Wilson can be described as an activist President in both domestic and foreign policy, initially he hoped to mediate among the warring European powers. Wilson insisted on maintaining a separate political role during the war and referred to the US as an "associated" power rather than an "allied" power.

Tensions among Europe's major powers were present long before the actual outbreak of hostilities in 1914. War was not only expected, it was even desired in certain circles. As Germany began its efforts to control the sea lanes with its submarine fleet it began attacking all

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<sup>4</sup> Snow, Donald M., and Drew, Dennis M., *From Lexington to Desert Storm*, Armonk, NY, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994, p. 112

shipping not only military. Commercial vessels became targets for the German fleet. Shortly after Americans began to die, President Wilson gave his declaration of neutrality.

## America's Response

### Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality

In President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality speech to congress on 19 August 1914 it is evident that he is appealing to the German government to protect any vessel flying the U.S. flag.

*The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned. The spirit of the nation in this critical matter will be determined largely by what individuals and society and those gathered in public meetings do and say, upon what newspapers and magazines contain, upon what ministers utter in their pulpits, and men proclaim as their opinions upon the street.*

*The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to allay it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility, responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honor and affection to think first of her and her interests, may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion if not in action.*

*Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak the counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend.*

*I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon*

*our sentiments, as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.*<sup>5</sup>

## **Wilson's First Warning to Germany**

On 10 February 1915, Wilson issued the first warning to the Germans, trying to maintain the trade between the US and Germany.

*The Government of the United State views those possibilities with such grave concern that it feels it to be its privilege, and, indeed, its duty, in the circumstances, to request the Imperial German Government to consider, before action is taken, the critical situation in respect of the relation between this country and Germany - which might arise were the German naval force, in carrying out the policy foreshadowed in the Admiralty's proclamation, to destroy any merchant vessel of the United States or cause the death of American citizens.*

*...taken in all such matters a position which warrants it in holding those governments responsible in the proper way for any untoward effects on American shipping which the accepted principles of international law do not justify; and that it, therefore, regards itself as free in the present instance to take with a clear conscience and upon accepted principles the position indicated in this note.*

*If the commanders of German vessels of war should act upon the presumption that the flag of the United States was not being used in good faith and should destroy on the high seas an American vessel or the lives of American citizens, it would be difficult for the Government of the United States to view the act in any other light than as an indefensible violation of neutral rights, which it would be very hard, indeed, to reconcile with the friendly relations now happily subsisting between the two governments.*

*The Government of the United States, in view of these considerations, which it urges with the sincere purpose of making sure that no misunderstandings may arise, and no circumstances occur, that might even cloud the intercourse of the two governments, expresses the confident hope and expectation that the Imperial German Government can and will give assurance that American citizens and their vessels will not be molested by the naval forces of Germany otherwise than by visit and search, though their vessels may be traversing the sea area delimited in the proclamation of the German Admiralty"*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality, 19 August, 1914,  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1914/wilsonneut.html>>

<sup>6</sup> 10 February 1915, *Strict Accountability: President Wilson's First Warning to the Germans*  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1915/strict.html>

In May 1915, after the sinking of the Lusitania and the loss of hundreds of American lives, Wilson eventually declared that the United States would hold Germany to a strict accountability for further losses of life. Less than two years later the Germans attacked American ships killing Americans. Wilson won re-election with his "keeping us out of war" campaign slogan now asked Congress for a declaration of war in April 1917.

### **Mobilization**

President Wilson had just been re-elected as the man who kept us out of war. Now he was faced with the prospect of becoming a major player in a war. Wilson's strategy was to take the prospect of war to the people, whose collective opinion he sought to shape and direct by his political methods.<sup>7</sup>

Wilson realized that by declaring war on Germany an army would have to be mobilized. The military strength stood at 3,441 officers and 77,363 men in the Regular Army along with 8,323 officers and 119,087 men in the Organized Militia, or National Guard. Unfortunately the 80,804 Regular Army could not be considered an effective "military strength" in the sense of being available as a mobile army.<sup>8</sup> US forces were at the time serving in the Philippines, Hawaii, Panama Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, China, and Alaska. Total available forces for mobilization stood at approximately 24,000 men.

An organized effort was needed to build the forces America would need. President Wilson calculated that America needed a standing Army of nearly 142,000 and a reserve force of 400,000. Military authorities such as General Leonard Wood had long subscribed to a universal, compulsory military training for all young men between eighteen and twenty-two years old.

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<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, David M., *Over Here*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980

President Wilson had addressed military preparedness during tours around the country. According to Sullivan, in *Our Times*, a number of young men would be glad to volunteer, the adventurous, the romantic, those who found their ordinary life dull, those having associations they would be glad to get away from, those without jobs, those who preferred the routine of military life.<sup>9</sup>

As for an economic motive to join the military, there was none. Every man who wanted a job could have one, and at high wages - America was furiously busy turning out munitions for the Allies.

The manpower problem was resolved with conscription. Wilson along with Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and Judge Advocate General Enoch H. Crowder put the machinery together for enforcing the draft.

The draft program was nearly complete when accusations of political favoritism arose in the creation of local boards to pass on exemption claims and appeals. Some recalled past scandals in the operation of draft laws and hoped to profit as brokers or substitutes, or by obtaining exemption for well-to-do clients. Overall, the operation of the draft system worked with only minor infringements reported. A lottery system had been implemented by Secretary Baker in an effort to show the nation absolute impartiality of the new laws.<sup>10</sup>

5 June 1917 was Registration Day. Baker's wide-flung, high-powered propaganda campaign to make the day a "festival and patriotic occasion" had succeeded in stirring up a national sentiment which dispelled or intimidated any reluctance to accept the draft. Nearly 10 million young men went to the polling places across America. As successful as the Registration Day was, there were some that did not believe in the draft and protested. According to Moore, in

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<sup>8</sup> Sullivan, Mark, *Our Times*, New York, Scribner, 1996, p. 491

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 515



*America and The World War*, only one draft riot made newspaper headlines... In early August a small group of draft objectors in Oklahoma organized to resist the draft by force. Force was answered by force. Enforcement of the draft was left to civilians, sheriffs and governors, officials holding their offices by popular vote. Promptly the leader of the Oklahoma uprising was slain and the band dispersed.<sup>11</sup>

Invariably members of local draft boards meeting for exemptions deliberately made examples of schemers who tried to escape the draft by marriages of convenience. Conscientious objectors and those young men that inflicted deliberate physical impairment to themselves to avoid being drafted created more serious problems for the boards. Overall it remains a fact that the draft system worked smoothly and satisfactorily.

Mobilization of America's young men was an impressive feat. No country had ever tried before to send two million men to fight a war three thousand miles away. The US had somewhat prepared for it. In 1915 the US had established a military government in Haiti and taken over customs in Nicaragua. Coupled with the National Guard mobilization and expedition in Mexico these were early attempts and practice for such a massive mobilization that made preparedness a popular crusade throughout the United States.<sup>12</sup>

A series of Registration Days brought forth the young men. In large cities, Army and Navy bands played noontime concerts. Speakers addressed luncheons of the Chambers of Commerce, Rotary and Elks clubs. Ministers, movie stars, soldiers from overseas, and local pretty girls echoed the country's call.

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<sup>10</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1968, p. 49

<sup>11</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, Greenberg Publisher, 1937, p. 108

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 47

A million new soldiers meant new training camps. All across America, training camps were being built to handle the new recruits. The Emergency Construction Committee of the General Munitions Board along with the War Department established thirty-two training cantonments, or camps. Each camp was expected to hold 28,000 men with 1,000 officers, but as it turned out most ended with 40,000 to 50,000 men. At first it was thought that tents could be used for the men but the Army made a surprising discovery that canvas was more expensive than wood. Also, the sudden call for haversacks, cots, and other canvas products caused a shortage in that commodity. Besides canvas, there was a short supply of blankets, uniforms and shoes. Some US troops entered battle wearing British or French uniforms due to the shortages. The fundamental weapon of the soldier is his rifle. On 6 April 1917 the US Army only owned 285,000 modern Springfields, another item in short supply.<sup>13</sup>

Barracks were built at great cost and construction not only included barracks, but administration buildings, post exchanges, quartermaster depot, kitchens shower and sanitary facilities, laundries, hospitals, commissary, recreation halls and numerous other structures. The War Department spread cantonments and camps up and down the eastern seaboard. There were fewer inland and only three on the Pacific Coast.<sup>14</sup>

Home guards were organizing across the country. Some of the better-trained and equipped National Guard units were being mobilized and sent overseas right away. Other units' efficiency varied with the resources of their State. In training maneuvers some National Guard militia units were equal of Regular Army troops training. Some of the National Guard units needed a great deal of refresher training.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>14</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968, p. 85

In the second week of August 1917, the first class of candidates of military commissions graduated as second lieutenants. They were known as "ninety-day wonders" or emergency officers. It is interesting to note that Regular Army officer instructors had become somewhat disheartened by these new college-campus cadets. They found that an academic degree was not always a guarantee of leadership qualities. They soon began looking for older men with some solid experience and proven leadership in their backgrounds. From the college campus' to the hastily built training camps America was readying for war.

# **Homefront**

## **Homefront and Politics**

Preparing for war was an interesting process. Just as with the lack of training camps for the new draftee's America was not yet running full speed with industrial production other than the munitions being built for the Allies. In August 1916 Congress created the Council of National Defense, composed of the Secretaries of War, Navy, Labor and Agriculture, and chaired by the Secretary of War. As these secretaries were already overworked, they were allowed to form an Advisory Committee of seven men representing a cross-section of the business-industrial-labor community. Members included Daniel Willard president of the B&O Railroad, Julius Rosenwald of Sears & Roebuck; and labor leader Samuel Gompers among others.<sup>15</sup> This council was tasked to investigate and advise on the location and best use of railroads, on mobilization of military resources, the means of increasing domestic production and the development of seagoing transportation. Along with these practical matters, they are credited with showing Wilson and his Cabinet members how through modern advertising methods, the public could be persuaded to buy or do anything. This Council of National Defense became central to the whole mobilization process when war was declared in 1917.

From this initial council, various other committees found their beginnings such as the Aircraft Production Board, War Industries Board and the U.S. Railroad Administration. These were the foundations at the federal level of preparedness for military buildup and mobilization.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 36

At the state level, different plans for supporting the military buildup and mobilization were beginning to take effect. The states began making plans, as yet uncoordinated with each other or the federal government. In Connecticut, the legislature approved a bill requiring a statewide inventory of men and materials that would be available in the event of war. Every male sixteen years of age and older was expected to answer a questionnaire, providing information on his residence, citizenship, marital status, dependants, occupation, health, and special skills. In addition other states such as New York attempted resources census of their young men. The passage of the Selective Service Act and its registration replaced various states attempts to collect data.

Americans began to be conscious in their prevention of waste, considered efforts to gain higher yields in production of manufactured goods and the need to increase food production lead to the birth of the War Emergency Food Movement. The Commission on Civic Preparedness in South Carolina encouraged farmers to grow more food. North Carolina urged the planting of war gardens and established the North Carolina Food Conservation Commission. Virginia established an Agricultural Council of Safety in an effort to boost food production. Across America agriculture committees set about to increase crop production by securing special credit for farmers through the county banks. Supporting slogans on posters began to appear posted in shop windows and on the sides of buildings such as "The Hoe Behind the Flag - Plant a Victory Garden"

Inspiration for the prewar efforts in the home had come from private individuals who relied on voluntary support in the communities. Later the more formal war movement sprang to life when business and professional organizations joined in with their support and cooperation.

Thomas Edison had requested to establish a national research laboratory to build and test new technological devices related to warfare.<sup>16</sup> As much as Edison supported the war effort, Henry Ford was opposed to the Great War. Spending his own money, Ford commissioned an ocean liner for a peace expedition to Europe. The trip was considered a disaster as many on board the ship bickered among themselves. When he was asked what he had gotten out of the peace expedition, Ford offered that he did not get much peace and that he learned that Russia was going to be a great market for tractors.<sup>17</sup>

The federal government sent letters to all state governors urging them to appoint state councils of defense to represent their individual State's here-to-for unorganized committee's, data, and raw material resources in an effort to pull together all the various programs and activities in support of the war effort. The key ingredient to the success of the state defense councils was the level of support from the States governors. Most wanted their states well represented and prepared for any emergency. The relationship between the War Department and the various state councils, however was not necessarily a good one. The War Department was anxious for the councils' cooperation but totally unwilling to give them any authority. For example, state councils were asked to help create a climate of favorable opinion for the draft process, but not given any direct control over the process. Draft boards were put under pressure by the federal government for delinquent paper work. State councils were expected to assist the War Department when asked for any assistance, but to not have an independent role as to local situations. The War Department had the lead in developing many programs for the support of the war.

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<sup>16</sup> Breen, William J., *Uncle Sam at Home*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1984, p.3

<sup>17</sup> Sullivan, Mark, *Our Times*, New York, Scribner, 1996, p. 487

Like many federal agencies the Treasury Department, like the War Department also insisted on building its own separate machinery in each state. They created Liberty Loan Committees, which encouraged people to buy "War Bonds" to help finance the war and expected the state defense councils to give considerable assistance in the war bond drives.

State councils' relationships with the federal government continued to grow, attempts by the Labor Department to get the assistance of the councils' was even more complicated. At the time most employment bureaus only operated in local market areas. This was the Labor Department's first attempt to create a nationwide public employment system linking the federal, state and local authorities, and was the beginning of the US Employment Service.

Various state programs across the country sprang up to meet the labor shortages. Programs such as the Boys' Working Reserve, a program designed to bring 15 to 17 year olds out to the farms to assist the labor shortage on farms. The Public Service Reserve, a registration agency for patriotic citizens was another such program.<sup>18</sup>

Women were encouraged to get out the house and join Red Cross groups to roll bandages, and knit socks, sweaters and mufflers for the boys headed overseas. In *Over Here!*, Churchill presented a list of war-effort suggestions for citizens released from Washington:

1. Observe personal and household economy
2. Urge individuals in private conversations to be patriotic
3. Help organize a Red Cross chapter if there is none in your community
4. Don't be slow to express your loyal sentiments. Everybody is either loyal or not loyal at a time like this

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<sup>18</sup> Breen, William J., *Uncle Sam at Home*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1984, p.27

5. Don't get overexcited. But on the other hand, don't be too anxious to suppress your enthusiasm - it helps others
6. Keep your American flag displayed from daylight to sunset - but don't let it become bedraggled. The flag is what you help to make it.<sup>19</sup>

## **Economics and Labor**

Prior to 1915 manufactured goods war orders from the Allies were few, however, the American marketplace exploded with new orders due to the war boom. The stock market soared, though stocks in munitions industries were favored by investors.

American businessmen had tried to profit from the neutrality period in four related ways. They diminished the expatriation of profits by purchasing large quantities of American stocks and bonds thrown on the exchanges by foreign belligerents desperate for cash. In turn, they recaptured many of the dollars paid by selling war material and food to the warring governments. When the dollar supply was exhausted, they offered credit to the previously capital-rich Europeans. Finally, Americans made great efforts to take over the traditionally European-dominated foreign commerce the war had disrupted, especially in Latin America.

To encourage farmers to increase production, the government guaranteed high prices for farm products. Wheat prices were set between \$2 and \$3.50 per bushel an unprecedented amount. Other products also increased in price. Farmers rushed to increase tillable land and this increased land values to double and triple their true value. Farm mortgages became inflated instruments which only added to the future problems caused by over tillage and the drought that lead to the dust bowl problems in the mid 1930's.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968, p. 54

<sup>20</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, Greenberg Publisher, 1937, p. 66



Labor strikes became common across the country. People were protesting the rising cost of living. Some strikers felt they were not getting their fair share of the profits and claimed the employers were profiting from the war contracts.

In the interest of greater war efficiency, the government rehabilitated the railroads and then returned them to private ownership. Returning the railroads to private ownership did nothing to prevent new obligations by the new owners from being heaped on the old debts, assuming a false earning power. Many banks and insurance companies post-war financial difficulties can be traced to such bloated values of railroad bonds and inflated farm mortgages.

The Federal Reserve Act was created to handle the problems of staggering war finance. The US had been lending billions to our Allies and there was no demand for security on these loans. There was no bargaining for terms or stipulated exact maturity dates. The Federal income tax was the basic factor in providing government credit. It meant that the Federal government could dip its hand into the pocket of every citizen at will. The Federal income tax was the basis of the high American credit during the war.<sup>21</sup>

The numerous federal agencies in Washington gave rise to an equal if not greater number of state agencies. The lack of coordination between Washington and the states caused tremendous confusion. The State Councils that had worked with the War Department and Labor Department had tried to work with other departments and agencies in Washington but met with little success. Many of the state councils complained about the increasing fragmentation in the national war effort and the resultant confusion at the state and local levels.<sup>22</sup>

Some states began to take action on their own, bypassing Washington by setting up their own commissions and committees to solve their problems. One effort attempted by the states

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 121

was to bring all the federal administrators together periodically to discuss mutual problems. This became known as the War Board concept. Their mission was to bring greater communication and coordination to reduce the demands on the civilian population. Not all War Boards worked out well however, for the most part most states reported enough success with the War Board concept to continue with the concept.

President Wilson sent an open letter to the State Councils, praising their work and congratulating them. He stressed efficiency, economy, democracy, and organization in their ability to reach into the smallest communities. The letter proved to be a useful morale booster for the local councils of defense.

The mobilizations drain on manpower meant women had to take the place of the men in factories, on farms, and in other areas of public service and responsibility. This new-found freedom experienced by many women was influential in changing the whole social fabric of modern-day societies leading ultimately to the emancipation of women, a cause for which many had been striving prior to the War.

Women's groups began to pressure the Council of National Defense to form the National Women's Committee. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, honorary president of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association agreed to chair the committee. Women responded willingly to the call. At their first meeting they agreed to investigate various topics and report back to the committee. Their task was to encourage women into supporting the national goals. It is interesting to note that they formed ten departments: Registration for Service, Food Production and Home Economics, Food Administration, Women in Industry, Child Welfare, Maintenance of Existing Social Service Agencies, Health and Allied Relief. They effectively established an

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<sup>22</sup> Breen, William J., *Uncle Sam at Home*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1984, p. 47

organizational structure encompassing defense work, relief work, and work for the preservation of the home.

In time the Woman's Committee became an all-encompassing federation of societies of volunteer women workers. Several national programs came from these beginnings such as public nurses in schools, encouraging young women to take civil service examinations, thus bringing more women into the federal workforce, and various health and welfare and children's programs. One side note to the activities of the Woman's Committee and their activities was the influence and strength it gave to the national woman's suffrage movement.

In response to suggestions from Washington, women further assisted the war effort by cutting down on the amount of material in feminine fashions. This was just the nudge needed to banish forever the unwieldy, toe-length garments that fashion had decreed for centuries. Skirts began an upward journey, which surprised and delighted American troops when they returned home.<sup>23</sup>

### **Societal Changes and Fears**

Here in the US women, elderly, invalids and children were urged by slogans and appeals from the Food Administration, the Red Cross and other organizations to "do your bit". The war came at a time when the feminist movement was making an immense surge forward. Women served as nurses and other traditional fields, but also in work that tradition had normally reserved for men. They became messenger "boys", operated elevators, acted as streetcar conductors, and labored full-time in the munitions factories to cite a few occupations.

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<sup>23</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968, p. 176

"Spy fever" began to sweep across America urged by stringent laws against enemy espionage and seditious actions. Everyone began watching for German agents. Suspicious activities became a broad term and employers were asked to provide information about employees having German names.

Even race relations became even more strained than in peace. Black Regular Army troops rioted in Brownsville, Texas, killing several civilians. Thirty-four leaders were arrested and court-martialed. Thinking that they were to be used as combat enlisted men, they felt educated blacks were fit to command them as officers. The war hysteria heightened rather than diminished racial tensions. The South angrily challenged this claim on the basis of historical racial superiority claims, but the claim could not stand the test of our declared mission in the war. The US was fighting to establish the rights of all peoples to choose their way of life. America could not now qualify that declaration by denying those rights to our own citizens. Americans were not champions of the Caucasian race alone. Blacks were soon commissioned.<sup>24</sup>

Ambassador James W. Gerard gave the following message to German Americans:

*I know that it is hard for Americans to realize the magnitude of the war in which we are involved. We have problems in this war no other nations have. Fortunately, the great majority of American citizens of German descent have, in this great crisis of our history, shown themselves splendidly loyal to our flag. Everyone had a right to sympathize with any warring nation. But now that we are in the war there are only two sides, and the time has come when every citizen must declare himself American - or traitor!*

*We must disappoint the Germans who have always believed that the German-Americans here would risk their property, their children's future, and their own neck, and take up arms for the Kaiser. The Foreign Minister of Germany once said to me "your country does not dare do anything against Germany, because we have in your country 500,000 German reservists who will rise in arms against your government if you dare to make a move against Germany." Well, I told him that that might be so, but that we had 500,001 lamp posts in this country, and that that was where the reservists would be hanging the day after they tried to rise.*

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<sup>24</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, Greenberg Publisher, 1937, p. 113

*And if there are any German-Americans here who are so ungrateful for all the benefits they have received that they are still for the Kaiser, there is only one thing to do with them. And that is to hog-tie them, give them back the wooden shoes and the rags they landed in, and ship them back to the Fatherland.*

*I have traveled this year over all the United States. Through the Alleghenies, the White Mountains, and the Catskills, the Rockies and the Bitterroot Mountains, the Cascades, the Coast Range, and the Sierras. And in all these mountains, there is no animal that bites and kicks and squeals and scratches, that would bite and squeal and scratch equal to a fat German-American, if you commenced to tie him up and told him that he was on his way back to the Kaiser.<sup>25</sup>*

The spread of wartime fear across America was an interesting process. Immigration had brought people from all over Europe in 1915 a million and half foreign born, nonnaturalized males were living in the United States: 450,000 Germans, 600,000 Austrians, 400,000 Hungarians. These figures do not count wives and children. In total, there were nearly 5 million people. Passage of the Sedition Act was one of the first acts of Congress, once war was declared. Super-patriots in hometowns watched "enemy" aliens with suspicion. Bands of these overzealous types were known to burst into "foreigners'" homes forcing them to sign Liberty Bond pledges and nailing yellow signs signifying unpatriotic citizens, outside the homes of those who refused. Men with foreign-sounding names were forced to kneel and kiss the flag by excited co-workers. Legislators were even pressured to ban all foreign languages within the borders of the United States including French, Spanish, Swedish and especially German.

Across the country, towns removed classic German literature from public library shelves. Socialists, liberals, radicals, labor leaders, union members and laboring masses were lumped together as enemies of the war and the people. In Centerville, Illinois German born Robert Paul

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<sup>25</sup> Gerard, Ambassador James W., *Loyalty*, text from a recording at the Library of Congress, 1 sound disc: analog, 78 rpm; 10 in

Prager was dragged from his home by a mob and lynched in the name of patriotism. His murderers were acquitted in minutes.

As war fever grew, German measles became "Liberty measles" and restaurants renamed sauerkraut to "Liberty Cabbage", and on the streets, people looked with scorn at dachshunds and a few were stomped to death, owners of German shepherds ran the risk of being arrested as spies.

In Boston a parade of socialists had been broken up and the marchers assaulted by soldiers and sailors. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, leaders of the anarchist movement in America, were jailed for protests against the draft.<sup>26</sup> Department of Justice agents came up with nearly two thousand cases of so-called sedition, pacifism, syndicalism, or pro-Germanism. Most were unwarranted, but the Justice Department pursued its furious activity by seizing any that questioned the war effort. Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, Indiana was arrested as was William D. Haywood, head of the Industrial Workers of the World. One critic commented, "Never have so many behaved so stupidly at the manipulation of so few."<sup>27</sup>

Ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 brought Prohibition, alcohol was now illegal, and this gave rise to many home brewery operations and thus kept the Justice Department busy for years until the amendment was repealed.

The prohibitionists were social reform agitators who sought a major change in society. Social reformers have been a nearly constant presence in American society since the early 19th century. Accounts of many social reformers' campaigns, often deal with the violence inflicted upon reformers seeking change in society and the violence engaged in by some reformers to achieve their ends.

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<sup>26</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, Greenberg Publisher, Inc., 1937, p. 107

<sup>27</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968, p. 168

The Anti-Saloon League switched from advocating local-option laws to advocating statewide prohibition in the middle 1900's. When ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment was completed, in January of 1919, thirty-three states were already dry, in addition to Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, and the Anti-Saloon League said officially that if the local option districts in wet states were included, 95 per cent of continental United States, with 70 per cent of the population, was dry.

## **Conclusion**

In April 1917, America entered the war. Totally unprepared, the US had no standing Army and it would take over a year to recruit and train the American Expeditionary Force. America's sons would not engage in combat until the summer of 1918.

Neutrality was the ideal, however, the economic and diplomatic issues brought the US into the fray. Economically, the US pursued trade with both sides by maintaining exports to both the Central Powers and the Allies in the Entente. America's prosperity was based on trade with Europe yet Germany was our greatest rival on the industrial scene. A German victory would have consequences that would affect US industrial trade. It became obvious, that Americas' support was leaning toward the Allies.

Wilson was successful in swaying America's attitude gradually from "neutrality to disdain for the entire war to a black-and-white depiction of the valiant democracies fighting desperately against evil autocracies." America expected full support from the citizens. People feared their neighbors and co-workers with foreign sounding names, especially those with German ancestry.

Up until to the Lusitania tragedy, some citizens openly had sympathies for the lands of their family origin, neutrality was a fact. After the Lusitania incident, American citizens were susceptible to any and all propaganda and actions of hate against Germany.

The events taking place in the United States from 1914 to 1918 were to change the country forever, more specifically, the 18 months during 1917-1918. The average American bought War Bonds, planted Victory Gardens, and waited for news from the front and family members.

Newspapers reported events as they happened, editorial pages ran political stories and cartoonist showed many war related topics.



At 11:00 A.M. on 11 November 1918 the guns fell silent. About nine million men in uniform had died. World War I was the defining event of the twentieth century. Its unfinished political and military business laid the foundation for an even greater world war that began in 1939. The war marked the end of Europe's moral and material hegemony over the world. It brought with it managed economies of the belligerent countries.

The war's origins reflected the economic and imperial rivalries and alliance systems that encouraged war. The rivalries were no worse in 1914 than earlier years. Statesmen and soldiers proved unable to control the events that followed the assassination of the archduke. European leaders seemed to have been less afraid of making war than of not making war.

Here in the American homefront, electricity was lighting the nation, from the cities to the farms. Henry Ford's "assembly line" factory was a model for industry. Mass production was making labor saving operations common place.

Mobilization of America's young men was a tremendous effort. General Leonard Wood felt the US "could not avert [being drawn into the war] by good intentions, nor protect ourselves by exhortation." Wood encouraged war preparedness and building a strong US army.<sup>28</sup> President Wilson felt that he should act as peacemaker to end the war. He envisioned the Great War as the war to end all wars by setting up the League of Nations.

America had gone deep in debt due to the war. Our economic structure had been seriously stretched. But, America ceased to be debtor nation and became a creditor. Prior to the war, the US owed \$3 billion to Europe, after the war, Europe owed the US \$10 billion. The US had greatly enlarged and speeded up its factory capacity, first to supply the war needs of Europe and later its own. US agricultural production had also increased to feed soldiers and citizens.

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<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, Mark, *Our Times*, New York, Scribner, 1996, p. 492

The war had accelerated the economic and social change in America. It changed the status of large numbers of people. There were a new "rich" and a new "poor". Wartime inflation reduced the US dollar from its normal 100 to 45.<sup>29</sup> The "new poor" were the people that lived on fixed incomes, while the "new rich" were the land holders, people that owned stock and that profited from increased prices.

Mainland America's brush with combat came with a U-boat off Cape Cod in July 1918. Moore describes the submarine attack on four barges in *America and the World War*, as more spectacle than danger for the general public.<sup>30</sup>

All over America, the red-chevroned soldiers and sailors (the red chevron was a symbol of discharge) were returning home. The days of the Liberty Loan campaigns, parades, speakers, and spy scares were over. Prohibition in the form of the Eighteenth Amendment was being voted on across the nation with the help of people like Billy Sunday. Sunday promised that the World War would make the world safe for democracy and that Democracy plus Prohibition would make the US an earthly paradise.<sup>31</sup>

As the servicemen returned, they found a US far different from the one they left. The short female fashions, a bouncy new popular music that included new styles of dancing. Families and communities had changed as well. Boys returned to discover their sweethearts married or engaged to men who had worked in factories or shipyards or found some other way to beat the draft. The American Dream had changed between 1914 and 1919. In Churchill's *Over Here!* Clifton Fadiman reflected that America was the only civilization in history to jump from

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 590

<sup>30</sup> Moore, Samuel T., *America and The World War*, New York, Greenberg Publisher, 1937, p. 219

<sup>31</sup> Churchill, Allen, *Over Here!*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1968, p. 164

adolescence to decadence without touching the steps in between.<sup>32</sup> The war had accelerated the freedom of Americans economically and politically.

The United States lost 116,516 people in World War I, and nearly 500, 000 to the outbreak of influenza. Thirty-six states were hard hit by the pandemic and nearly one quarter of the population fell ill. In army camps the number of deaths began to match the number of men falling in battle overseas, and the death rate in the US grew fifty times larger than usual.

New federal organizations such as the US Labor Department and the Agriculture Department were born during this period. Increased material output from America's factories made coupled with increased wages not only in the cities, but on the farms improved the everyday life of most Americans. America's losses during the war were minimal compared to other nations but US gains were incredible. Gains in Women's Suffrage, early Civil Rights, and in the field of arts - painting, writing, and music, what an exciting time it must have been.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 227

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